MATTERS of ART

Another Loan Exhibition of Masterpieces—The Characteristics of Persian Art—Paintings by Horatio Walker—Etchings and Drawings from Modern Hands—The Vermeer Prints.

By ROYAL CORTISSOZ.

The loan exhibition, especially for charitable purposes, is an old story in New York. The American collector is generous in this way, as he is in bequeathing his treasures to the museums. On the other hand, he has been learning in the last few years to do something new, which is to say that he allows his pictures to be seen by the public much earlier than was once the case. He still clings in some instances to the quaint fashion of concealing his ownership of a given masterpiece, but finds that he can easily enough be forgiven. After all, when we go to an exhibition it is the artist's name, not the owner's, that interests us. Very ingenious and pleasant is this scheme whereby the dealer, after he has sold a number of fine pictures, borrows them back for a show. The Duveens and the Knoedlers have both done this to good purpose in the present season. Gimpel and Wildenstein did it also with their Fragonards, and now the Scott & Fowles Company does it with the Dutch paintings which were reviewed in The Tribune yesterday. We give among our reproductions to-day some further glimpses of this impressive array of seventeenth century art. The collection of eighteen pieces represents Rembrandt, Hals, Hobbema, Ruysdael, Steen, Cuyp and Maes. It is an excellent example of the new fashion adopted by the dealers and their patrons.

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN.
(From the painting by Hals.)

Some Dainty Devices Out of the Ancient East.

Students of philosophy and morals are always coming upon points of contact between the East and the West. The gnomic wisdom of the ages is much the same in every quarter of the globe. But in art this universality, when it exists, must be got at sometimes by working backward through layers of local tradition. That is why Oriental painting forces the Western mind to go through long and difficult processes of initiation. Often enough its appeal is nominally immediate. On the side of mere realism there are quantities of Chinese pictures which a child could understand. But to grasp the bald significance of the object represented is one thing; to savor the recondite charm which goes with the representation is another. Some such reflections as these are bound to be promoted by any exhibition of Oriental art, and they flow with peculiar promptness from the show now open at the gallery of the Berlin Photographic Company. It is a show of Muhammadan miniature painting, which is to say that it illustrates the craftsmanship of the Persian calligraphers and illuminators. They enjoy a distinction of their own in the history of art, and in recent days Western connoisseurship has developed for them a new cult. The modern collector, always ardent upon a fresh trail, is as keen upon these dainty devices, covering a space to be measured in inches, as he is upon a great Titian or a rare tapestry.

The first thing that he has to do when he sets out in pursuit of the Persian masters is to throw overboard all of those prejudices of his which are rooted in Western classicism. There is nothing "academic" about a Persian painting. It has no such diagrammatic balance as can be found at the bottom of multitudes of European pictures. The Asian ideal, when it gives to a composition a beginning and a middle and an end, does so with the informality of a spontaneous descriptive narrative, romantic or realistic, as the case may be. Its characteristic motives are drawn from court life and the hunting field. The Persian artist had his mystical moments, and he was active in the field of portraiture, but on the whole he was a story teller, deeply interested in the world in which he lived. The little pictures in the present exhibition are vividly suggestive therefore of social traits and sportive movement, of gallant knights and ladies engaged upon their amusing affairs with a certain discreetly tempered vivacity. The spirit of all this work is essentially dramatic, mobile. But here comes in that matter of tradition, which is a matter of style. The Persian painter, looking largely for his effect in pure and dazzling tints, was by the practice of centuries a kind of jeweller in color. He had a curious way of getting a serene pellucid light into his scenes, but he did not allow it to break his tones, and this renunciation was confirmed by his linear habit. Art and calligraphy were closely related, for him, and hence in painting the figure he defined it in an exquisite but rather wiry line, which he then proceeded to fill in with a practically solid tint. The result is that a gallery of Persian paintings, such as the one now under review, looks like nothing so much as a great picture book.

"LA MALADE IMAGINAIRE."
(From the painting by Jan Steen.)

It is not the mere scale of the paintings that determines this impression. It is their whole character. What is suggested by the tiny picture itself is enforced still further by the rich borders. These conclusively point to the decorative genius of the school. Within the scope of that genius there lie all manner of delightful traits. In Persian art you find both men and animals portrayed with extraordinary truth. Landscape in the large sense is beautifully mirrored there, and it is rendered the more lifelike and the more charming by the skill and tenderness with which plant life is delineated. Merely for their flowers these miniaturists would enjoy lasting renown. But when all is said their chief function is to ravish the eye as with a perfect glowing page in some volume of fairy lore. This is the end of all their radiant color, all their miraculously refined and expressive draftsmanship. In this exhibition of more than two hundred pictures and manuscripts, carrying the subject through three or four centuries and representing its growth at divers different centres, there are of course varied developments to be noted. But the fundamental note is throughout the same. Limited in the appeal that it makes to the imagination, restricted in the ideas of style which it illustrates, and indubitably "precious" in its very essence, it is a little cloying and even, under certain circumstances, a little wearisome. To be happy with Persian art one must be content with a slender sheaf of its masterpieces. But that it produced masterpieces, rich in a sensuous pleasure and instructive as authentic souvenirs of a vanished civilization, no one can doubt.

LOADING LOGS—WINTER.
(From the painting by Horatio Walker.)

Current Shows of Paintings and Prints.

Mr. Horatio Walker is making at the Montross gallery an experiment so interesting that it is to be hoped it will be repeated. He had only eight new paintings with which to form an exhibition, but he has hung these in a large room, leaving one wall bare. In consequence his work appears to the best possible advantage and the atmosphere of the show is somehow very fresh and attractive. Why, after all, should an exhibition depend upon force of numbers? The important point is that it should contain good pictures and that these should be seen with plenty of space around them. Mr. Walker's pictures are all good, though some of them are less engaging than others. He is least satisfactory, when he is most ambitious. Take, for example, the large canvas which has the place of honor, the "Man Sawing Wood." He has, of course, sound precedent for thus portraying an humble type on an almost monumental scale. Millet did just that sort of thing. But then Millet had an instinctively monumental way with him and in his conception of form was so rarely gifted that he could invest one of his pictures of a peasant with something of the grandeur that belongs to one of Michael Angelo's hieratic figures. Form, for him, as for the great Italian master, was in some sort a vehicle through which he expressed ideas of majesty and beauty. Mr. Walker misses this subtle magic. His "Man Sawing Wood" is only a man sawing wood, and save for the fine sky in the background there is nothing in the picture to give us any strong æsthetic sensation. He leaves us similarly unmoved when he paints "The Royal Mail," in which the Canadian postman drives his sleigh across the frozen waters. The mild picturesqueness extorted from the scene is accompanied by no other grace. But there are instances in which the subject cries aloud to be heightened by the glamour of style. With themes more to his real taste Mr. Walker achieves not only the force and truth which have always been characteristic of him, but a simple, penetrating beauty.

You find it in a picture like "An Autumnal," in which he is content to interpret landscape, resting for his effect upon atmosphere and color. It would be hard to beat the clear, singing note of blue which gives its loveliness to the sky in this picture, and the artist is equally successful, in much the same way, when he paints his "Boy Feeding Calves" and his "Loading Logs—Winter." Here man and beast are subordinated to the landscape, and in his portrayal of the latter Mr. Walker uses a veritable power. His tree forms are exquisitely defined, and the air that plays around them is the true air of winter. The wholesome cold spirit of the scene is expressed with all the simplicity in the world, and yet with a fineness poetizing the subject. There are water colors as well as oils in the exhibition, and one of them, the little "Moonlight," has an unexpectedly romantic accent. The collection as a whole is uncommonly exhilarating. A talent like Mr. Walker's, so sincere and so robust, touches us as with the healthfulness of the homely scenes he loves to celebrate.

A kindred type of artist is Mr. W. Herbert Dunton, who shows at the Milch gallery pictures of cowboys watching their cattle, trappers, buffaloes and other subjects drawn from what he calls in his catalogue "the old West." He has spent much time amid the scenes of early frontier life, and it is with an accurate and spirited touch that he makes his transcripts from one of the most picturesque phases of our history. He knows how to gain a piquant effect, as when in "The Breed Trapper, 1830," he shows his adventurer leading a trio of pack horses and silhouettes the group against a distant mass of blue mountains. The same skill in the development of contrast crops out in his little sketches of Mexican scenes, bright splashes of sunshine and color.

At the Hahlo gallery there is an exhibition of etchings and drawings by Mr. J. André Smith. There is a rather curious paradox to be observed in his work. Ordinarily one would expect an etcher to show more freedom in his sketches than in his designs on the copper, but Mr. Smith's drawings are a little hard, whereas the moment he takes the needle in hand his line seems to grow a shade more flexible. It is, then, not only an easy but a very clever and interesting line. Mr. Smith has found his subjects in New York and in New England, in Bermuda, England and Italy, and wherever he has travelled he has contrived to hit upon picturesque subjects and to draw them primarily in a truthful restrained manner. It is a pleasure to observe an etcher of old buildings who has a sense of their purely architectural traits and is loyal to them instead of sacrificing them to some supposedly amusing effect of light and shade. Only a master like Whistler can afford to put the linear arabesque in the foreground. Mr. Smith gives us credible and interesting portraits of his charming scenes and he does this with an adroit elegance, so that his etching is worth while for its own sake. His style may not have a very fresh personal quality but so far as it goes it is light, graceful, and in the true spirit of the needle.

The work of a man who has contributed heavily to the establishment of that principle which Mr. Smith follows may be seen at the Ralston gallery. He is Mr. D. Y. Cameron, the young Scotchman who profited by the example of Whistler but beat out a style of his own and in his turn reacted to good purpose on his contemporaries. The merit in Cameron's etchings may to some extent be measured by the success with which one dealer after another makes an exhibition of his work during the season. This latest show must be the third or fourth we have encountered since the fall, but the twenty-odd plates in it give us almost as much pleasure as though we had never seen them before. Among them are a few of the landscapes into which Cameron put so much romantic sentiment, the "Ben Ledi" and "On the Meuse," but most of the subjects are architectural. He is a master of that art at which we have glanced above, the art of etching a building so that its weighty, structural character is clearly expressed. He can be pictorial in the fullest sense, as witness the incomparable "Laroche" or the "John Knox's House," but never does his faculty for line and color lure him into making a stage scene out of his ancient edifices. This is a small exhibition but it is made up of good impressions and is sufficiently representative.

More Drawings, Chiefly from Modern Hands.

A pleasant surprise for the connoisseur of drawing awaits the visitor at the Seckel gallery, which is hung with fifteen charcoals by the late Thomas S. Noble. This Kentuckian artist, who was past seventy when he died about seven years ago, never achieved any great fame with his paintings. But his drawings show that he had a genuine feeling for landscape sentiment and could interpret it with uncommon technical ability. There is a drawing in this collection in which a road goes slowly up and around a long hill, with slender poplars marking the thoroughfare. As Noble studied this scene the tall trees brought into it a hint of Italian grace and dignity. He understood the art of omission. His pictures are shrewdly composed. Yet he conceived them in a free, thoroughly sympathetic way, getting the character of the Southern countryside into his work. His touch was suave and pure and he had, finally, a delicate sense of tone, modulating his rich blacks into cool grays, and arriving at his high lights, at just the right moment, in natural fashion and with the best of good taste. His workmanship, in short, is as sound as it is fluent. His beautiful landscapes should not be neglected.

Apropos of these drawings of Noble's we note with special interest the character of the latest portfolio issued by the Société de Reproductions les Dessins de Maitres. When this body of collectors and amateurs was formed in Paris a few years ago it was dedicated more particularly to the works of the old masters, and these steadily predominated in its annual publications. But the prospectus made allowance for modern work—when it was work worth while—and the present portfolio is given entirely to drawings of our own day. It is amusing to see, as we turn these over, how dateless is really good draftsmanship. The example of Degas, "Danseuse Saluant," a masterpiece of simple, swift definition, might in its linear eloquence have come down to us from the eighteenth century, and it has, to boot, a suggestion of movement which an artist of that period might have envied. Similarly, an "Etude de Bébés," by Besnard, is strongly akin to a sketch by a Florentine of the high Renaissance. There is a sketch in this portfolio by Forain which in its summary notation of the salient points in a scene by the river would not have disgraced Rembrandt. Decidedly it is a good thing for the Société to be thus sympathetic, now and then, toward the modern school. The portfolio contains, it is true, some pieces of no great interest, but in the main it well enforces the point that a good drawing is a good drawing, regardless of its origin.

We must mention here the latest of these schemes for placing in the hands of subscribers, at a nominal price, good reproductions of rare drawings and other works of art. It is the "Archiv fur Kunstgeschichte," published by the house of Seemann, at Leipzig. For the sum of 36 marks one receives four portfolios containing eighty plates in all. These reproduce, by a good photographic process, treasures in public and private collections, and pains is taken to choose subjects not generally familiar. Moreover—and in this the publication is particularly to be commended—the choice of the editors is not confined to one form of art. Painting and sculpture are both illustrated and there is a fairly generous sprinkling of drawings. The first, second, and third portfolios for the opening year are before us. They take us through all the periods and all the schools. Titian follows Rubens. A "St. Sebastian" by Lodovico Carracci comes next to a curious bit of sixteenth century Dutch sculpture, and after that we have a fantastic drawing by Hans Leu. Beside a "Crucifixion" by Jacopo Seliajo, or a portrait by Perroneau, there is a religious subject by a Spanish Primitive, or a superb portrait by Cossa. These excellent plates are on a comparatively small scale but are quite large enough to give an adequate account of the work in hand. What is especially gratifying about the publication is its inclusion of things in private galleries which are otherwise practically inaccessible. By a process of this sort the resources of the student are enormously extended. The brief notes prefixed to each portfolio are from competent hands and give all the necessary information. From every point of view this enterprise is to be regarded as no less beneficent than the services of the Arundel Club, the Vasari Society and similar bodies, and in its wide scope it possesses a merit peculiar to itself. The modest collector, who must be satisfied with reproductions, should make a note of it.

To him also are addressed certain plates, specimens of which we have recently received from an American firm, the Vermeer Company, of New York. These "Vermeer Color Prints" have been developed by Mr. T. M. Cleland out of an ambition concerned primarily with artistic and educational ideas. It is easy to make a colored print that is merely "pretty," or in one way or another to give the more expensive photogravure in colors a character pleasing in itself though not especially significant of the picture reproduced. Mr. Cleland's object was to take the ordinary four-color halftone process in hand and by giving minute attention to every detail force it to yield results both accurate and beautiful. He has devoted himself thus far to pictures in our museum and his reproductions bear the legend "Authorized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Well may they have this line in their favor. The four prints thus far issued possess a quality reached by no other publications of the sort that have ever come to our notice. They reproduce Vermeer's "Young Woman Opening a Casement," Manet's "Boy with a Sword," Canaletto's "Piazzetta," and Lorenzo di Credi's "Madonna Adoring the Child." In other words, four totally different problems were attacked—and Mr. Cleland has achieved four different triumphs. One of the prints, the Canaletto, seems to us perhaps a shade more wonderful than any of the others in its reproduction of the very surface quality of the original. The blues and whites in the sky are beyond praise. Yet we are possibly mistaken in differentiating here. When we turn to the Vermeer we are constrained to admit that in this case, too, the reproduction is wellnigh perfect. The great trouble with the latter day color print is its shiny, brittle, look, its loss of all that means texture in a painting, its hardening of the tones and its consequent dislocation of values. Mr. Cleland's reproductions avoid all this. They have no glister, but give us instead something of the actual quality of painted canvas. We have alluded to their educational purpose. Printed on a generous scale and set upon appropriate mounts, they will pass readily into frames; but accompanying each one is a well written historical note, so that the amateur may not only adorn his walls but learn something about the picture which he hangs there. The prints are issued in sets of four. The second set will include the "Mars and Venus" of Veronese, Turner's "Saltash," Metsu's "Music Lesson," and Rembrandt's "Portrait of a Man." Little by little the Vermeer Prints should cover most if not all of the best things in the museum.

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG WOMAN.
(From the painting by Hals.)

"DANSEUSE SALUANT."
(From the drawing by Degas.)

THE FAN'S COMPLAINT.

"Then, your husband was all right at first?"

"Yes, sir."

"Later he became morose and irritable. To what do you attribute the change?"

"The home team took a slump."—Pittsburgh Post.